

PROFESSIONAL FORUM



TRADOC Liaison Officers

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Most people in the military services have heard, at one time or another, the expression "allied interoperability." Most of us are also aware that in broad terms this means developing compatible equipment, weapons, doctrine, and procedures so that we can more easily conduct military operations with our allies. (See also "Bridging Differences," Major James A. Kelley and Lieutenant Colonel Francis M. Glynn, INFANTRY, July-August 1988, pages 15-17.)

One important formal mechanism designed to accomplish this task today in the U.S. Army is a group of Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) liaison officers who serve as the focal point for allied planning and for the exchange of allied information. TRADOC maintains a worldwide network of liaison officers (LOs) to most of the United States' key allied nations.

Representing the U.S. Army and the United States as an LO to an allied army is a unique and challenging opportunity that brings with it a great deal of autonomy and responsibility. Since there are relatively few LO positions, however, it is not common knowledge that these LOs even exist. Thus, because many of our best officers do not compete for these positions, TRADOC is interested in correcting this situation by telling officers about them.

In general, the mission of a TRADOC liaison officer is to represent the com-

mander of TRADOC and his subordinate installation commanders and to serve as their primary communications channels with U.S. major commands and allied countries around the world. They coordinate the exchange of information between these organizations and countries on all aspects of doctrine, materiel, tactics, and procedures—working toward rationalization, standardization, and integration (RSI) or, basically, toward allied interoperability. This is a big mission and one in which individual liaison officers rarely see concrete and immediate results. Their successes are subtle, and

often incremental, yet extremely important to combined or allied operations.

TRADOC's liaison mission, managed by the TRADOC Field Element at Fort Monroe, Virginia, consists of nine liaison officers to nine major U.S. commands and 35 LOs to 10 allied nations (see table). In some cases—in the Federal Republic of Germany and France, for example—liaison officers are assigned primarily by branch, since they are accredited to host country branch schools. But in others, such as Israel or Italy, for example, where only one LO is assigned, the U.S. liaison officer might come from

NUMBER OF LOs	U.S. MAJOR COMMANDS	NUMBER OF LOs	ALLIED COUNTRY
1	U.S. Army Europe	1	Canada
1	U.S. Army	1	France
1	U.S. Army Command/Combined Forces Command/U.S. Forces Korea/Eighth U.S. Army	1	Israel
1	U.S. Army Aviation Systems Command/Troop Support Command	1	Italy
1	U.S. Army Japan/Japan Ground/Self-Defense Force	1	Japan
1	U.S. Air Force Air Weather Service	1	Korea
1	U.S. Marine Corps Combat Development Command	1	Spain
1	U.S. Space Command	1	Turkey
1	U.S. Southern Command	1	United Kingdom
1	U.S. Western Command	1	West Germany

any one of the combat arms.

A brief look at the organization of the TRADOC liaison net in France will illustrate one type of LO organization in a particular country.

TRADOC has eight liaison officers assigned, or accredited, to six French Army branch or service schools, plus the French staff college in Paris, all supervised by a colonel as senior LO, also in Paris. Since each LO has secondary accreditations to one or more additional schools or organizations in the French Army, however, the U.S. liaison net in France has much greater contact with the French Army than just the seven primary schools.

Since no U.S. troops are stationed in France, TRADOC LOs serve an extremely important function. For a large part of the French Army, contact with the LOs is the only contact it has with U.S. forces. Also, LOs have a much greater access to French Schools, and often units as well, than attaches have.

A closer look at one particular liaison position, that of the TRADOC Infantry LO to France, will serve as an example of what an Infantry officer might find himself doing as an LO.

The current TRADOC Infantry LO to France is an Infantry/Foreign Area Officer (SC11/FA48). He is technically assigned to Fort Benning, Georgia, but with duty in France. (His personnel records are maintained at Benning.) This type of organizational arrangement is important because it strengthens the ties between the liaison officer overseas and the U.S. branch school he represents.

DEMANDING

The Infantry LO to France is accredited to four major French Army organizations, with his primary accreditation and his home base at the French Infantry School in Montpellier on the Mediterranean coast of southern France. But he must also divide his time among three other organizations: the French Airborne School (in Pau near the Pyrenees in southwestern France), the Operational Parachute Staging Base for the 11th Airborne Division (part of the French Rapid Action Force) located in Toulouse,

and the office of the chief of French Infantry located in Paris. As one might expect, performing this mission, in addition to visiting other units and installations, requires a great deal of travel. Because he is assigned directly to a French Army institution, he not only sees daily life in the French Army but takes an active part in it.

The primary mission of the TRADOC Infantry LO to France is to represent the Commandant, U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS), in France and to work toward allied interoperability with French forces. He does this in several ways: by presenting lectures on the U.S. Army and NATO to French Infantry officer basic and advanced courses; by briefing senior French Army officers on such topics as AirLand Battle doctrine or NATO interoperability issues; by serving as an advisor to the commanders of his accredited French institutions on matters concerning the U.S. Army; by working with French Infantry combat development officers who are conducting research on materiel or doctrinal projects; and, among other things, by regularly serving as LO between U.S. and French units of corps size during major NATO command post exercises such as the Crested Eagle series. And, of course, he does all of these things using the French language.

In addition, to provide allied information to TRADOC and USAIS, the Infantry LO monitors all aspects of the French Infantry community including special operations forces, the French Foreign Legion, and mechanized, motorized, and airborne infantry forces. He then communicates items of potential interest to the U.S. Infantry community.

It should be quite obvious that being a liaison officer is not a typical assignment. The job carries with it some obvious hardships. For example, since LOs are generally the only U.S. personnel for hundreds of miles, there is no post exchange or commissary just around the corner, no Armed Forces Radio or Television, and the LO's children must attend the local school—and learn the language. Such common things as electricity bills, telephones, insurance, medical and dental care, and dozens of others can appear alien and confusing.

Because the assignment is in a new and

different environment, this type of work is not for everyone. Not only does an officer have to have a strong desire to be an LO, he must also have the unwavering support of his family members. It is not enough for the officer himself to want the job—his wife will also have to learn a foreign language and undergo the rigors of the three-year tour, and his numerous social responsibilities will require that he and his wife work as a team.

REWARDING

But the job offers many rewards and advantages as well. The opportunity to represent the United States overseas as a military ambassador is a unique and exciting opportunity for a young officer and his family. The LO designs his own agenda within the guidelines established by his chain of command and U.S. policy—and, of course, bases it upon his own sense of responsibility and professionalism.

There are no set qualifications for becoming a TRADOC liaison officer to an allied country. Any officer with a good file and either confirmed language ability or the aptitude and desire to attend language school can become a liaison officer. The most important requirement is that he have a strong background in his branch. He should be in the rank of major or lieutenant colonel, but when necessary TRADOC has assigned qualified captains.

LO positions are slated by branch but usually with foreign area officer as a functional area. Even this can be waived, however, for an otherwise qualified candidate. And an officer must be willing to undergo a rigorous selection process. The most important criterion is that an officer have a sincere desire to participate in the development of allied interoperability and to see the gap between the United States and its allies diminish.

For the right officer, being a TRADOC liaison officer can be one of the most rewarding positions of his career.

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